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## The broken promises of social mix: the case of the Cabrini Green/Near North area in Chicago

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Public policies of social mixing have been enacted as the reversal of what segregation and concentrated poverty are presumed to have produced: intensified social problems (i.e., “neighborhood effects”). In addition, the pervasive discourses of diversity have provided more support for the idea of social mixing. Studies on planned and unplanned diverse neighborhoods have shown how certain diverse patterns can emerge and endure over time. Yet these studies have failed to explain how such demographic diversity becomes integration. In this article, I draw on a multidimensional perspective of socio-spatial integration to present a qualitative case study of the Cabrini Green/Near North area in Chicago—a neighborhood with a long history of segregation and recent socially engineered diversity. The case shows how contentious this new coexistence has been, and how segregation has been shifting its mechanisms of enforcement from housing to other spheres of life. I conclude with reflections on four dimensions of socio-spatial integration, and on the troubling policy and theoretical implications of the “social mix” paradigm.

**Keywords:** segregation; integration; social mix policies; Cabrini Green; neighborhood effects

### Introduction

At Eva’s Café, a nonchain and upscale coffeehouse at Sedgwick Street, upper-middle-class, White yuppies sit with their Apple laptops in cushy chairs in front of a fireplace. The cozy atmosphere allows them to look at the winter storm through the large windows. But what can also be seen is the perfectly opposite situation on the other side of Sedgwick: one of the two prison-like entrances of Marshal Field Apartments, a large subsidized housing project, inhabited by approximately 1,500 poor African Americans, who are harassed by the police and avoided by Whites when they are out in the streets.

This snapshot shows the reality of what most demographic analyses would classify as an “integrated neighborhood”—people from highly different racial and socioeconomic backgrounds sharing the same geographic space. But in sociological terms, this is far from representing integration. The two groups in this case are worlds apart. They do not go to school or church together. They walk on different sidewalks. They frequent different public spaces. And when they meet in front of each other, they rarely say “hello.” In the words of an interviewee, they live “geographically close, but realistically very far.”

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Chicago has grown with large areas of segregated poor populations, and neoliberal transformations have made its situation worse through low-quality and segregated education, public and private disinvestments, and disappearing opportunities for formal employment. However, policy initiatives such as mixed-income housing have created an apparently opposite picture—a few areas of extreme race/class diversity. In Chicago, these policies have put together poor Black, public-housing residents with wealthy condo owners (most of them White). In this case, the arrival of higher-status residents has modified the quality of public and private services, encouraging debates about the possibility of less-segregated cities, and raising high expectations of major social outcomes from these mixtures. Nevertheless, this proximity between groups has created more symbolic than concrete gains, due to persistent divisions in other spheres of life, and institutional arrangements perpetuating socioeconomic differences. Within this context, this article investigates how this proximity to wealthier neighbors affects the integration of excluded groups in several dimensions—access to opportunities, intergroup relationships, and symbolic constructions of communities.

The article is organized as follows. First, I review some basic approaches on segregation, integration, and related public policies. Second, I describe the selected case and the methods for this study. Third, I show the results of this research, classified into four dimensions of socio-spatial integration (physical, functional, relational, and symbolic). Finally, I conclude with reflections on these dimensions, and on theory and policy implications. Within the literature, this article aims to contribute with a comprehensive framework for analyzing social mix, considering a wide range of different implications that these environments impose on poor residents.

### **Segregation, integration, and public policy**

The term *residential segregation* is generally used to denote the spatial concentration of social groups due to forces of race and/or class exclusion (Marcuse, 2005). For decades, the dominant perspective in the United States has focused on concentrated poverty and its consequences, in the so-called “neighborhood effects” literature (Jargowsky, 1997; Massey & Denton, 1993; Sampson, Morenoff, & Gannon-Rowley, 2002; Wilson, 1987). Contesting these dominant visions, more critical authors have claimed that the consequences of segregation come from subsistence strategies in the context of State withdrawal (Gotham, 2002; Wacquant, 1997), and that neighborhood effects are actually the result of specific institutional arrangements (Gans, 2008; Wacquant, 2009). In this context, contemporary policies for social mix have essentially equated “integration” with the spatial dispersion of clusters of populations marginalized by race and class—hoping to reverse the presumed negative neighborhood effects of segregation.

Despite widespread use in policy discourses, there is a notable absence of clarity on the meaning of the concept of integration (Ruiz-Tagle, 2013). The word is usually employed to designate the opposite of segregation, but without an understanding of its conceptual implications. Integration is a fuzzy concept, mainly because its internal meaning implies a double-edged sword. The etymology of “integration” shows that the word could mean “integration” and “integrity” at the same time (Arnal, 1999). That is, while integration (joining to new elements) carries the risk of breaking the system’s integrity (intactness), complete integrity leaves out all other elements (Arnal, 1999). Moreover, the different disciplinary uses of the word “integration” show potential benefits, neutral effects, and potential damages (Ruiz-Tagle, 2013). Within benefits, integration could mean the elimination of barriers and the opening of closed systems. Among neutral

effects, there is the simple mixing of parts in the same space. And on damages, there is the loss of identity, rupture of integrity, or disintegration by incompatibility.

In social theory, the study of *social integration* has passed through three different traditions. First, functionalist sociology treats integration as a *neutral description of relationships*, always linked to consensus, social organization, and order (Durkheim, 1997). Second, post-WWII progressive sociology links integration to the *positive ideas of inclusion*, rights, and citizenship (Strobl, 2007). And third, integration has been studied in the United States as a *negative reaction to desegregation policies*, mainly in housing and schools, which is captured in the idea of “integration exhaustion” (Cashin, 2004).

Social mix policies have emerged in historically specific times and places (Sarkissian, 1976)—in mid-nineteenth-century Britain under utopian visions of reunification, under egalitarian ideals after WWII, and recently to address the social problems of concentrated poverty in several neoliberal contexts. Here, I suggest that four persistent ideas have become the foundation for recent desegregation policies in the United States: (1) the portrayal of ghettos as pathological social forms (Jargowsky, 1997; Massey & Denton, 1993; Wilson, 1987); (2) the link between poverty concentration and social problems, or “neighborhood effects” (Sampson et al., 2002); (3) the implicit suggestion that “geographies of opportunity” follow the more powerful groups and trickle down to the rest (Galster & Killen, 1995); and (4) the assumptions that mixed-income environments would create a virtuous circle of social networks, social control, and role models (DeFilippis & Fraser, 2010). Indeed, social mix policies have been surrounded by an ambitious policy rhetoric, as Henry Cisneros (2009) put it: “Well-planned mixed-income communities can become the focal point for the essential progress of our cities and our nation” (p. 13). However, several scholars have stressed the need to lower these expectations (see DeFilippis & Fraser, 2010; James., DeFilippis, & Joshua., 2012).

Although policies of social mixing have indeed improved the quality of private services, they have also led to broken social ties, assimilation, and disintegration among the poor population (Bolt, Phillips, & Van Kempen, 2010; Cashin, 2004; Greenbaum, 2002). The most recent evidence has shown that the benefits of these policies have been more symbolic than instrumental (Joseph & Chaskin, 2010), due to persisting divisions in other spheres of life, such as schools and public space, and due to institutional arrangements perpetuating socio-economic differences. Integration is seen as an ideal for policy-makers in historically segregated contexts, but it is often reduced to residential proximity, without taking into account several other aspects that contribute to and maintain social exclusion. Indeed, mixed-income communities have been recently criticized as a neoliberal attack on the poor. The idea of “gentrification by stealth” (Bridge, Butler, & Lees, 2012) refers to a State-led destruction of low-income neighborhoods to make way for enhanced real estate profits.

The empirical study of socio-spatial integration can be divided in two strands. First, there some authors focus on *unplanned* diverse neighborhoods, trying to make the case that less segregated environments are not against human nature. And here I distinguish two currents. On one hand, there is an *ecological-demographic model* trying to explain the spontaneous emergence of stable diversity patterns in terms of demographic changes (Ellen, 2000). And on the other hand, there is a *politico-institutional model* that stresses the active influence of powerful actors and grassroots organizations working to achieve a desired coexistence (Cashin, 2004; Nyden, Maly, & Lukehart, 1997). However, most authors studying unplanned diverse neighborhoods just show how this diversity emerges and how it is sustained. But they *do not explain how diversity could lead to integration*, and frequently *overlook the persistence of different forms of segregation* and its consequences.

In a second strand, authors focus on *planned* mixed-income neighborhoods, with an abundant literature from the 1990s, to the extent that social mix is one of the most studied subjects in the field.<sup>1</sup> However, there is a wide dispersion of subtopics, which blurs the big picture, the foundational assumptions, and the final outcomes. There are studies on the perception of physical impacts (e.g., Joseph & Chaskin, 2010), studies on the overall benefits for poor people (e.g., Fraser & Kick, 2007), studies on the cohesion between different social groups (e.g., Arthurson, 2002), and studies of social interactions (e.g., Rosenbaum, Stroh, & Flynn, 1998), to name a few. Yet *there are not enough comprehensive studies* focusing on the interrelation of the different dimensions that affect the integration of disadvantaged groups. Many years ago, Sarkissian (1976) showed how different (and even divergent) were the arguments for social mix, ranging from aesthetics, equality of opportunity, social consensus, urban functionality, spirits of emulation, and so on. If we connect this dispersion of topics with the lack of clarity of the concept of integration, we can see that a more comprehensive approach is essential.

To tackle the complexity of social integration, several authors have used a multi-dimensional approach. In the case of socio-spatial integration, I started with a two-dimensional approach elaborated incrementally by David Lockwood, Jürgen Habermas, and Anthony Giddens (Ruiz-Tagle, 2013), who made a distinction between system integration (reciprocities between collectivities) and social integration (reciprocities between actors). Based on this, I have suggested that socio-spatial integration is manifested as a relationship comprised of four dimensions (Ruiz-Tagle, 2013): (1) *physical*: proximity between different social groups; (2) *functional*: access to opportunities and resources; (3) *relational*: nonhierarchical interactions; and (4) *symbolic*: identification with a common ground. This definition uses elements from the three mentioned traditions of the study of integration. It is descriptive, as the functionalist tradition, since this is a taxonomic effort to account for all possible effects of social mix. It is somewhat normative, as in the tradition of progressive sociology, because it questions the deformation of a historical ideal. And it is critical, as in the negative US tradition, because it contrasts the experience of diversity with an acute analysis of socio-spatial exclusion.

### **Cabrini Green/Near North area: case and methods**

As an example of urban diversity, I chose the Cabrini Green/Near North area in Chicago. Cabrini Green was a huge public housing project within the wealthy Near North Side, inhabited by a majority of poor African Americans. After decades of concerted efforts of social and economic disinvestment (Goetz, 2013), it is being transformed into a diverse area with the introduction of mixed-income developments. Cabrini Green, and the neighborhood around it, present a long history of diversity, segregation, racial struggles, and recent attempts to erase its history (Bennett & Reed, 1999). The different initiatives from the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), the Chicago Housing Authority (CHA), and the City of Chicago for Cabrini Green have sought the same general goals: demolition of high-rise buildings and creation of sustainable mixed-income developments. The general idea was to counteract the supposed main problems (social isolation, concentrated poverty, and neighborhood viability), to stimulate communal relations, and to attract new businesses and opportunities for low-income people. The rationale for creating a mixed-income project there is summarized by a CHA official:

The general idea of mixed-income is to discontinue the isolation of low income families in high density housing, **attract higher incomes** [people], **which would attract services and**

business to areas that might not normally come, and opportunities for growth. . . [emphasis added]

Figure 1 shows the limits of the area and the location of different types of affordable housing.

At present, with a population of almost 10,000, this area exemplifies racial, socio-economic, and housing diversity. In racial terms, the area is 52% Black and 37% non-Hispanic White. In socioeconomic terms, 54% of households are part of the first and second income quintiles of Chicago MSA, and 36% are from the fourth and fifth quintiles.

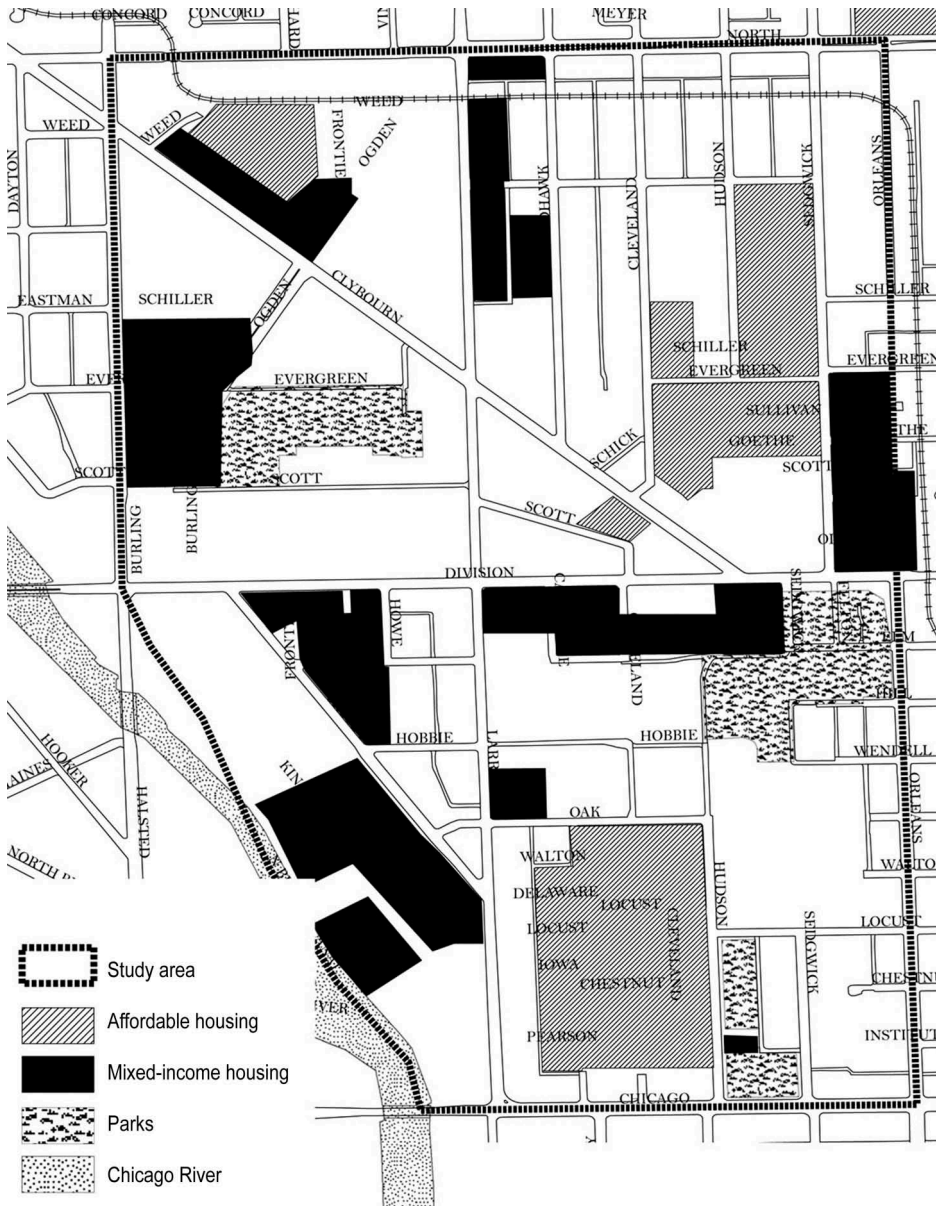


Figure 1. Different types of affordable housing.

Source: Author's analysis.

But not all Blacks are poor in this neighborhood; 15% of Black households are part of the three wealthier quintiles. And regarding housing, there are a number of situations. For the poor population, there are public housing units, subsidized units in mixed-income developments, and Section-8 (Housing Choice Voucher, HCV) units in nongovernmental projects. And for the middle-class population, there are rental and condo units in mixed-income developments, and other multifamily and single-family housing units. [Figure 2](#) shows some of the housing developments and [Table 1](#) shows the demographic changes in the last decade.

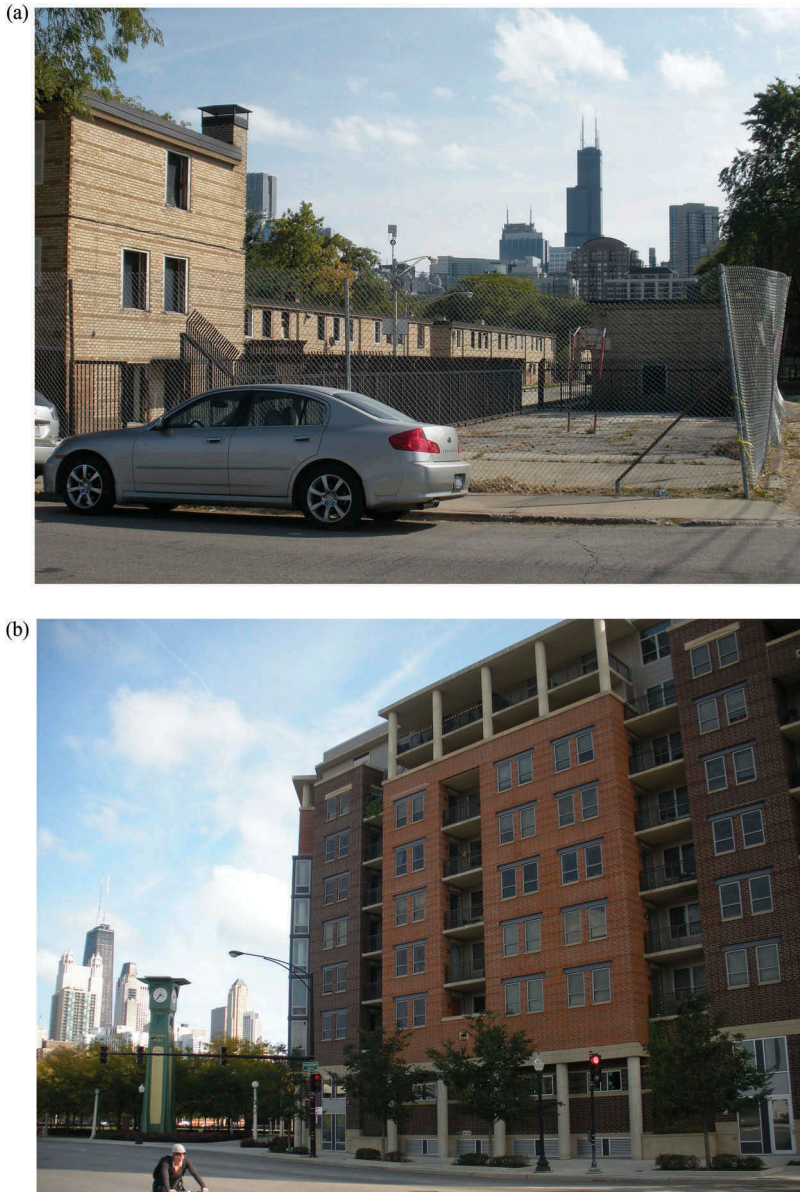


Figure 2. The Row Houses (old Cabrini, left side) and Parkside of Old Town (mixed-income, right side).

Source: Author's photographs.

Table 1. Demographic changes in the Cabrini Green/Near North area, 2000–2010.

	2000	2010
Total population	10,290	9,645
Percentage black	86.7%	51.7%
Median income (in 2011 dollars)	\$24,450	\$32,500
Percentage with income over \$50,000 (in 2011 dollars)	27.7%	44.9%
Percentage homeowners	12.1%	27.8%
Percentage of families that are poor	54.3%	42.4%

Source: 2000 US Census, 2010 US Census at [www.census.gov](http://www.census.gov).

Data for this study were drawn from eight months of qualitative research. I used three types of data sources: (1) 50 interviews with residents and institutional actors,<sup>2</sup> (2) field notes from meetings of the Near North Unity Program (NNUP)<sup>3</sup> and observations of several spaces of inter-group encounter,<sup>4</sup> and (3) “spatial inventories” in which I located the traces of the symbolic presence of each group.<sup>5</sup> Among interviewed residents, I assumed three axes of differentiation; established/newcomers, low-income/higher-income, and Black/White. The first two axes were overlapped: established people pertained to the old community of low-income housing developments, and newcomers were all middle and upper-middle-class looking for a good housing deal in this prime real estate land. But the third axis was less strict; while established low-income residents were almost 100% Black, the better-off newcomers were majority White, with a sizeable Black component. All collected material was coded in two rounds. First, during fieldwork, I coded it with descriptive and *in vivo* coding procedures. In the second round, I created outputs from each code and I summarized the ideas of each quotation, so as not to lose richness of data. I then followed some analytical manipulations to order, deploy, and triangulate data from different sources.

### **The experience of integration**

Based on the multidimensional framework provided at the outset, here I deploy the results of this research so as to highlight the interrelationship of dimensions.

#### ***Relational dimension: interaction between groups***

On a warm September afternoon, I was sitting between the basketball court and the baseball field in Seward Park—an old relic from the times of Cabrini Green that is now remodeled to fit the gentrified identity of the neighborhood. Attendance in this park is highly diverse, with low-income Blacks from all ages, and upper-status young adults with their children. The police is an official constituent of this space as well: most of the times, there is a police car parked in the middle of the park with two police officers. On this day, while playing basketball, a group of 15 low-income Black kids started to play like a fight—simulating martial arts, but not really fighting. Two seconds after that, the policemen, watching them closely from their car, sounded their sirens. The kids looked at the police car and went back to play basketball as if nothing happened. Some minutes after that, several White, upper-class adults started to arrive to the baseball field; it was an organized league with four or five teams. Besides their equipment, these adults brought several boxes of canned beer, which they drank



every time they were not actually in the baseball diamond, without even covering the cans in a paper bag. The policemen, at the same distance they were from the Black kids playing basketball, limited themselves to watching and enjoying the game, overlooking what was evidently illegal conduct in public space.

Snapshots like this illustrate the stark contrasts in police treatment and how different groups in this area interact mostly with their own. Low-income Blacks use public space to socialize and meet new people. On the other hand, high-income Whites not only avoid Blacks whenever possible, but also use public space with pre-existing networks of friends, coming from their more extended networks. In other words, public space in this neighborhood is not an instance of cross-socialization for the two groups. In more controlled and domesticated spaces (like coffee shops, restaurants, and supermarkets), high-income people represent the majority, and there is more room for casual encounters. By contrast, in more open and freer spaces (like the parks), low-income Blacks are the majority—although under severe police control. This use of public space is also indicative of the way both groups interact with each other. During my interviews, I observed a generalized sense of ignorance and distrust of “the other.” Low-income Blacks feel that upper-class people are bringing resources to the neighborhood, but they are not seeing many benefits of those resources. On the other hand, several upper-class residents think that low-income Blacks are going to be gone sooner or later, based on general trends of gentrification, or even on direct information coming from real estate brokers. Charlotte, a Black middle-class professional in her fifties, who works for the NNUP, describes this situation:

11 years ago... 10–11 years ago... when the Plan for Transformation first started being implemented (...) people were told “get in now, rock bottom pricing!!!... these people will be gone in 5 years!!!”...

The Near North Unity Program—the only instance in which low-income and upper-income people met and discussed community issues on a regular basis—was the main place to observe how conflict was deployed in real life. The program was created by the neighborhood’s Alderman (an old resident of Cabrini Green), and was thought to bring unity and social cohesion to this diverse area. Indeed, it has served at least to gather highly different people around the table and discuss local issues. However, this has been the place where distrust, ignorance, resentment, and anger have been focused in subtle and overt ways. And these conflicts were marked heavily by the issue of race. Low-income Blacks socializing in the neighborhood are generalized as criminals and loiterers, and upper-class Whites are generalized as people solely motivated by the protection of their property values. A public discussion in one of these meetings between Rachel, high-income White, and Aisha, low-income Black, both around 40 years old, summarizes this mistrust:

Rachel: there’s a liquor store that we’ve been trying to close down (...) and they’re still dealing drugs and stuff by there (...) when you try to get rid of them... that’s an enormous thing that literally took years to get rid of that(...) Why can’t CHA (...) do something to get rid of the Row Houses and get rid of the... to do something that help the police with the crime?

Aisha:(...) the people who are staying in front of the liquor store, of course they’re selling cigarettes!!! and not drugs!!! get to know your community a little bit!!!

As it is manifest here, the use of language from upper-status residents is highly polite when referring to matters of race, while low-income Blacks are more vocal and explicit. In the intimacy of interviews, however, there were some upper-income Whites who talked more openly and even recognized a sense of racism. Diane, a White upper-middle-class woman in her forties, describes this situation:

... to be honest with you... I never was very racist, but I feel, living in this neighborhood... I've become very racist... I mean, I think it's not a very nice thing to say about people... because it's not something I'm proud of, but... people are kind of lazy... I'm not saying all low-income people are lazy or whatever... but here you see a lot of laziness, and you don't see people for... like a better work... they're hostile...

But the most complicated racial position is that of the Black middle class. The most difficult situation for them, which arises frequently in this diverse neighborhood, is when high-income Whites take them as subsidized residents or are afraid of them as potential criminals in the streets. In those situations, they show solidarity with low-income Blacks in their perception of upper-status Whites—but at the same time, they try to reaffirm their class position and maintain a distance from poor Blacks. Lance, a Black middle-class professional in his seventies, portrays the interclass racial solidarity:

... everybody has a right to live... they need to learn to respect each other... they need to learn to understand that... like Black connotes fear, so does dogs... you know, with people... grabbing your purse when you see me walk past... "could you think I'm going to just rob you?... who told you I was going to rob you?!?!... I could buy your ass!!!"...

But Darnell, a Black middle-class homeowner in his forties, describes the intra-racial fragmentation produced by class distances:

I think we still keep this distance... not that we know each other... I mean... I'm clearly a homeowner, I'm clearly in this relationship with... I think, there is... a distance that we keep. I don't know... I don't think it's a lack of trust... I just think it's, you know, a fear of crossing that line to get to know each other... on a... on a deeper and trusting level...

In terms of group solidarity, established low-income Blacks have the advantage of being more cohesive due to their historical, long-established presence in the area. They feel somewhat united by their past history, present constraints, and uncertain future, as Latreese, a Black lower-middle-class local leader in her forties, describes:

... this is my neighborhood!, that's why I'm here... if I feel like I don't belong, I wouldn't be here (...) you know, but I'm committed to the residents in this community, and the youth in this community... and that's why I live here...

In contrast, high-income people do not have a common history, and have a very disconnected present. Most of them have extended networks, with their friends, family, and colleagues living outside the neighborhood. However, through these NNUP meetings, high-income residents have been gaining cohesion, knowledge, and power. They have overcome their situation as "disconnected outsiders," they have established new organizations (beyond NNUP), and they have used their higher levels of cultural capital to be updated, and even advanced, on many issues affecting the urban and social development of the neighborhood. In fact, they have turned the claim of low-income Blacks into their

own claim: a right to stay and decide the future of their neighborhood. Kevin, a White upper-middle-class condo owner in his fifties, describes this:

I don't think anybody owns the neighborhood... which has been a little bit a problem at... with some of the... older Cabrini Green... people... who are like... this feeling of... something they own... and... I don't... I... I don't think that's the case (...) there's a feeling of "I've been here longer"... and I think they have to accept the diversity in the neighborhood (...) you're living there one day or 100 years... you have the same rights...

Although it would seem fair that any resident could claim some right of ownership, there are two problems with this quote. First, there is a wide power differential between poor Blacks and wealthy Whites when claiming such rights. Second, there is a particular vision from the most privileged ones, who call for an equal treatment of both groups when they are the newcomers—but reject that equality when they are the established. For decades in Chicago, the color line has been enforced from upper-status residents who have claimed rights of ownership, sending hostile and unwelcoming messages to poor Blacks (see Massey & Denton, 1993). But despite these stark differences, there are notable exceptions. Emily is a White, middle-class, 40-year-old resident. She has a college education, works in several areas of specialization, and has three children in her own house with her husband, where they have been living for 18 years. Her sense of community across racial and socioeconomic borders was really authentic, going beyond the traditional “happy talk” about diversity (Bell & Hartmann, 2007). She teaches taekwondo at a neighborhood (nearly 100% Black) school, directs a block club organization, participates in a basketball group, and has volunteered in the Alderman’s office. That is why she was the only White receiving a prize for the “heroes and advocates” of the community from the NNUP. She is really involved and prefers not to know about crime and the like, and instead works for positive interactions among all types of residents. She was also critical about the attitude of other middle-class people for not involving themselves, and not looking at poor Blacks as human beings:

... I do feel different... I feel that sometimes people miss the point... some of our friends... would say, you know... “oh, they just got rid of the gangs... they got rid of the gang activity”... and I say “don't you understand that gang is a word, and there's actual people and faces that go to that?”... and others looking for its community, and that's their way to have community... because if they don't have community, they just meet someone to show them another way...

As institutions working for intergroup relationships, the local churches could play an important role for this neighborhood. However, the number of different churches in the area is overwhelming. There are nine churches for a territory of 10,000 people. First, there are five churches that were deeply involved in the old Cabrini Green community and whose congregation is almost 100% Black: St. Mathews, St. Luke, Union Baptist, Holy Family Lutheran, and Wayman AME. Second, there are some old churches—LaSalle Street Church, Fourth Presbyterian Church, and St. Joseph Church—that were part of the immigrant community that predates Cabrini Green (mainly Italians), and that now attract residents from the Gold Coast, upper-class residents in mixed-income projects, and some middle-class Black residents as well. Finally, the newest institution is Park Community Church, a wealthy church that is explicitly “heavy on young urban professionals, singles primarily (...) almost entirely Caucasians,” as one of its members described it. This saturation of churches, and their different congregations, has detached them from a

once-relevant role of social cohesion in the neighborhood. In fact, some residents think of churches as “the most segregated institution.” In recent years, however, the local churches have created the Near North Ministry Alliance, trying to organize activities together. Those activities, like a joint Thanksgiving celebration, have created authentic “moments of integration,” but have been no more than the moment. In fact, most of the congregations come from out of the neighborhood, due either to the displacement of low-income Blacks, or simply to a choice of a particular denomination or community. Besides, they have passed from the protection of the established community against demolitions and gentrification, to a conflict with their funding sources, and even to an overt participation in development businesses. Kevin, a White upper-middle-class condo owner in his fifties, explains the role of one church in land development:

... he’s [member of X church] doing a very good job in NNUP... but, [X] church is the owner of a 500-unit development... that’s going to be built right across the street... we didn’t hear anything about it... 500 units... 4 high rises... a major, major deal...

The issues of crime and safety are other aspects that further complicate intergroup relationships. The problem of security is pervasive, but is marked by a major racial polarization: Blacks of all classes do not feel unsafe at all, while all upper-income Whites feel highly unsafe in the neighborhood. Upper-status Whites describe that the most problematic issue in their everyday life is Black people standing on sidewalks. Most Whites I interviewed referred to this situation as if Blacks were selling drugs, robbing people, or intimidating them. David, a White upper-middle-class condo owner in his forties, portrays this feeling:

I don’t feel safe walking down the street, even if I stand on the opposite side of the Section-8 housing... I still don’t feel safe... I’m afraid of being mugged, I’m going to get stabbed... because there’s loitering... the loitering drives me nuts!, it’s just the hanging outside... it’s like... “sit on your damned porch!, you know, sit in your house... go to a park, don’t be hanging out on the street corner!... because that’s just makes people uncomfortable... maybe it’s your way of life, but you know what?... **you’ve got to start changing your way of life!**”... [emphasis added]

The role of the police dealing with crime also worsens these relationships. As I mentioned with the situation between basketball and baseball players in the park, there is a very different treatment for low-income Blacks. Because of the constant harassment, most Blacks laughed when I asked them about the role of the police. Latreese, a Black lower-middle-class local leader in her forties, describes this:

... ha-ha-ha-ha-ha!... I think that the 18th district, specifically... has the worst police in the city of Chicago... I have a case now against the police from the 18th district (... ) I think our police officers are horrible!... and I think that they perpetuate the crime and the bad behavior in this neighborhood...

Latreese also told me about other practices of the police, like releasing a gang member in a rival gang’s territory, so as to let the gangs kill themselves, and then reducing their involvement and responsibility. But the problem of crime in this area has been receding. According to the Chicago Police Department, the peak of crime for the 18th District was in the 1990s, when index crimes per 1,000 people were about 160, compared to a citywide rate of about 116. More recently, the same index is 73 for the 18th District, 77 for the

Near-North-Side community area, 93 for the Cabrini Green/Near North area, and 56 for the City of Chicago. Even though 93 is a high rate for the Cabrini Green/Near North area, the vast majority of these are property index crimes, which are 106% above Chicago's rate per 1,000 people; violent index crime rates are only 4.5% above the citywide level. Other nonindex crimes, like drug abuse, fall below Chicago's rate in three of the four census tracts of the Cabrini Green/Near North area, and are higher only in the Row Houses. This does not mean, moreover, that residents in the area are criminals or drug dealers. Cabrini Green has been always a site where drugs have been traded, even considering the decrease in recent decades. But many residents affirm that both sellers and buyers are not from the neighborhood, and most importantly, that not all of them are Black. In any case, the decrease in crime in present decades could be attributed mainly to the gentrification process.<sup>6</sup> And this just means that the present community is more aware about crime, and mostly, that there is more reporting, which is definitely crossed by racial distrust.

Several low-income residents stress how upper-class residents participate in drug consumption, and how different is the treatment for them, especially in mixed-income developments. Condo owners can smoke marijuana and at most, they receive a fine. But when subsidized residents do something of lesser gravity, they are evicted. Rules and regulations in mixed-income projects are set by the developers and then revised by the condo-owner associations. And this is where most of the intergroup problems emerge, with very unbalanced power relationships. Janice, a Black public housing resident in her forties, who lives in one of the new mixed-income buildings, describes this one-sided enforcement of rules:

... so many rules... things you can do, things you can't do... like, I can't barbecue in front of my house (...) but you can... or, if I'm playing loud music, I'm out for eviction... if you're playing loud music, you'd get a fine... if the company complains about... "my neighbor is too loud"... I'm out for eviction... you'd get a warning... if someone leaves my unit and get arrested, and they say he last visited me... I'm out for eviction, you're not...

The unwritten objective of these rules and regulations is to keep low-income Blacks under the strict moral mandates of upper-middle-class residents—a process that has been documented in several other mixed-income projects in Chicago (Chaskin, Khare, & Joseph, 2012). In other words, if these upper-class residents were to buy a housing unit there, and share several spaces with low-income Blacks, it was because they were aware of the screening processes that public housing residents had to endure, and because they will be able to create and enforce various rules and regulations to supervise the behavior of their lower-status neighbors. Thus, despite the existence of a transversal organization (the NNUP), the general feeling among upper-status and lower-status groups is of a highly distant relationship, and the power of the middle class has been exerted to put pressures on the local government in order to prevent more public housing and any growth of the low-income population. In this context, intergroup relationships in this diverse neighborhood are marked by fear, distrust, and avoidance.

### ***Functional dimension: access to resources and opportunities***

In a cold February day, I was trying to recruit my last interviewees from a public space. I went to a supermarket located in a new shopping mall in the middle of the neighborhood. I was hoping to recruit some employees at the supermarket who were also residents in the area, since I was told in interviews that this was one of the main employers of local

residents. Trying to verify this information, I began to ask, one by one. To my surprise, although most employees were Black, none of them was living in the neighborhood—with the sole exception of one woman who had lived there until 2005. Even the management personnel were surprised. Continuing my search, I went to an upscale Starbucks coffee shop on Clybourn, within the same shopping mall. The employees were changing the shift; a pair of White young guys was leaving, and a pair of young Black guys was arriving. None of them was a resident, and after asking, I learned that none of Starbucks employees lived in the area. I finally ran out of time, since I had scheduled an interview at Mercy Housing, a new single-room occupancy (SRO) housing development comprising 96 units occupied mostly by poor African Americans. My appointment was with Rodney, a 40-year-old low-income Black man. He and his friends showed me how optimistic they were about the commitment that the Alderman had secured for 75 jobs for local residents at a new Super Target under construction at Larrabee and Division. Such new developments seem to give them hope for their future, but the reality of 29.6% unemployment for Blacks in the neighborhood compared to only 1.9% for Whites suggests an entirely different picture.

The reality of job opportunities in the neighborhood could not be farther from the promises of mixed-income housing. The majority of jobs available in the neighborhood are service-industry jobs created in the new stores established in recent years to serve the newly arrived upper-income residents. However, according to LEHD Origin–Destination Employment Statistics, the percentage of the workforce living and employed in the Cabrini Green/Near North area is extremely low; it fluctuates between 2.5% and 4.5% (between 114 and 166 individuals). Even with the addition of 75 jobs by Target, the differences in the availability and quality of employment are wide, and have not changed significantly since the arrival of upper-income residents. Keisha, a low-income Black resident in her sixties, describes the low quality of substandard jobs:

... for low-income or anyone at this point in the market... the only jobs that seem to be available are service jobs... and service, I mean... at any grocery store, a little restaurant, or something... are the jobs which would not afford anyone to come up... the jobs that teenagers used to have as part-time jobs, are now being held by adults, and even elderly... or just say older workers, so... no, I don't think, in this area (...) anyone to find any really good paying job...

To make matters worse, access to service jobs relies heavily on social and communications skills, especially after the Great Recession. Employers remain reluctant to hire low-income Blacks because of their segregated socialization, and because of upper-status White customers' discrimination against low-income Blacks' language and manners of self-presentation. Candice, a Black SRO resident in her forties, emphasizes how discriminatory are these requirements for low-income Blacks, making the comparison with immigrants, like Indians or Chinese:

I'm an African American, I'm Black... I can't work in a decent establishment without speaking correct English, without sounding... without people understanding me... otherwise they say "well, you won't fit in here"... but everybody else can come and speak all crazy... and then, they say... "oh, they're acceptable though"... but we're not!!!...

Most upper-income residents believe that the changes in the neighborhood are bringing more opportunities to low-income Blacks. Upper-income residents reproduce the same discourse of the CHA that once opportunities are there, it is only the individual's

responsibility to seize them and fulfill the American Dream—as some upper-status Whites in my interviews claimed they had done during their life trajectories. But upper-status Whites have no awareness of all of the barriers described above, and they also seem to know nothing of all the opportunities that were removed with the housing demolitions of recent years. Low-income interviewees reported how Cabrini Green itself, as a massive housing development, provided several jobs for resident assistance, janitorial services, and outreach workers. Moreover, several social service providers were assisting the population in the past, but now most of them are gone. The Alderman, an older Black Cabrini Green resident in his fifties, describes this situation:

... Cabrini Green doesn't qualify as a needed community anymore, because incomes [in the overall area] are too high... and so, it's not under those designated areas that qualify for a lot of different low-income services, because the majority of the people aren't low income anymore...

Local schools are also a vital part of the existing “geography of opportunity” for low-income Blacks. However, schools have operated in such a way that have pushed out this group from every space available, and have maintained and even increased their segregation. Although most upper-income residents do not have school-age children, most of those who have, put their kids in private, selective enrollment magnet, or charter schools. In other words, they have avoided neighborhood schools, whose students are (according to State and national data) almost 100% Black, and almost 100% low-income. Before all the redevelopment plans of Cabrini Green, there were five neighborhood schools receiving the children of its residents; Truth, Schiller, Byrd, Manierre, and Jenner. More recently, Truth School was closed and its students were put into Schiller. Then, Byrd was closed and its students were transferred to Jenner. Next, Schiller was closed and its students were put into Jenner. And during the 2013 campaign to close more schools in Chicago, Manierre was scheduled to be closed and merged into Jenner—the only neighborhood school remaining, and whose new building was part of the Plan for Transformation. Moreover, the building structures of these schools have been converted into private, selective enrollment and charter schools, leaving just a few options for Cabrini residents. A similar story happened with local high schools. Colley High School was closed and its students were put into Near North Career Metropolitan (NNCM). NNCM was later closed and its students were sent to Wells, Lincoln Park, or the successful (but selective enrollment) Walter Payton. [Figures 3 and 4](#) show the closing and merging of elementary and high schools in the area.

The big problem here, beyond the known resistance of upper-status Whites to be outnumbered, is a chain of “unintended” consequences created by the policy of mixed-income housing. First, affordable housing provision is left to market processes through mixed developments, which cannot act countercyclically—and which are hence tightly constrained in times of economic crisis such as the years since the 2008 crash. Second, with no public housing being built and the low-income population already displaced, there is no timely replacement of units, which causes depopulation of low-income Blacks. Third, this depopulation causes low rates of enrollment in neighborhood public schools, in turn forcing schools to tightly ration their resources, leading them to lower their quality. Fourth, falling enrollments and erosions in quality create the perfect mixture of rationales for Chicago public schools to close these establishments. And this has been just part of the Chicago public school's reform, which Gutierrez and Lipman (2012) summarize as the

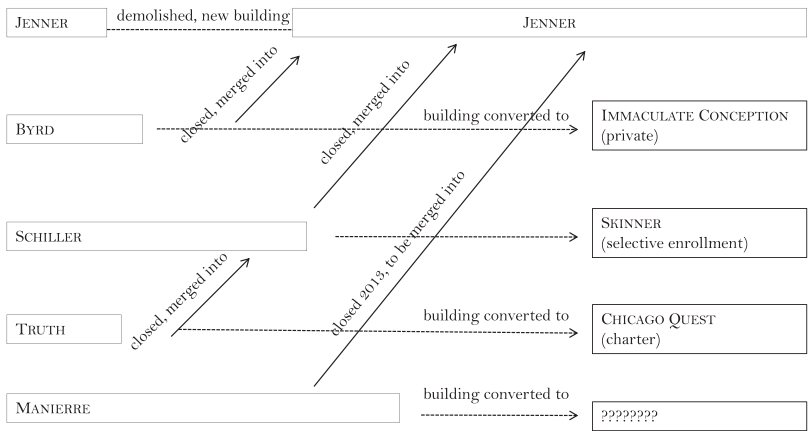


Figure 3. Closings and merging of neighborhood elementary schools.

Source: Author’s analysis.

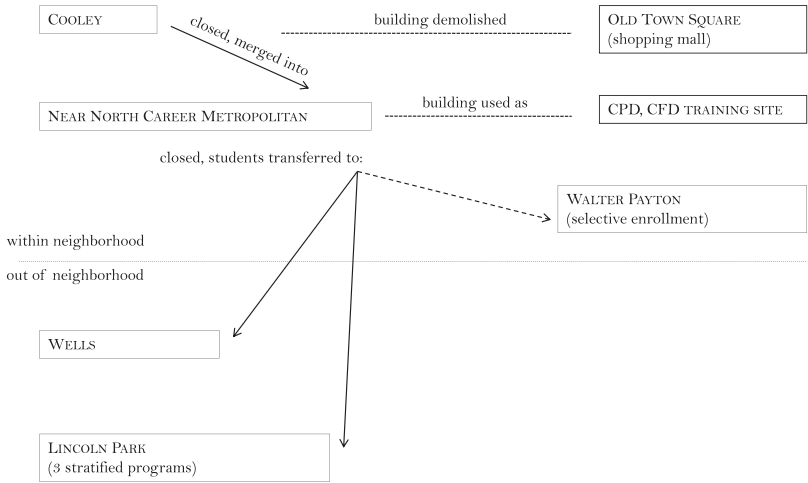


Figure 4. Closings and movement of students among local high schools.

Source: Author’s analysis.

“three Ds” of *destabilization, disinvestment, and disenfranchisement*, referring to the impact on minority areas that has created exclusion by gentrification, and de-democratization and privatization of public institutions.

The general opportunities in the neighborhood are also highly tied to the development of its future transformation, which remains uncertain. The CHA is not clear about future planning in the area, and there are pressures from both fronts—low-income organizations and the now-empowered condo owners. Besides, the CHA is selling land for nonresidential uses, like the new Super Target, which is being built on the site of the Cabrini Green high rises. In addition, due to the lack of demand for condos, developers have been forced to rent their units, either to market-rate housing or to affordable housing. This uncertainty about the future is an issue that has both groups under a high level of stress, and for quite



opposite reasons. Upper-class residents want the Cabrini Green Row Houses to be demolished as were the rest of the towers, and would want fewer public housing units in their place—all of them under the mixed-income scheme. In this regard, the main problem for high-income residents is that of getting trapped by the drop in housing prices. Ronald, White and a major developer in the neighborhood in his fifties, explains this:

the [economic] crash... made movement very difficult to owners... ah, not only that they lose their equity... that makes them mad... now they can't sell... because they... they're below their mortgage, or there's other problems... they can't sell (...) now they can't go, now they're really mad... so it's a problem... I think that's creating some of this prejudice too...

On the other hand, low-income residents want more public housing to be built (for the displaced), and they want fewer nonresidential projects. Some of them want more units in nonmixed-income schemes, due to the mentioned pressures of paternalistic, unequal rules, and regulations. Besides, there is a critical shortage of public housing, a lack of new developments, and an uncertain income mix for the few coming ones. In general terms, then, low-income Blacks have the sense of being pushed out from every space available. Some of them have been forced to leave the neighborhood, with or without rights to return. The remaining ones struggle to stay put under the strict control of the police and condo associations, and have seen their children displaced from one school to another. And in terms of jobs, they have seen several new positions opened for outsiders, and only a few low-income Blacks have been placed in substandard jobs. So they remain trapped in chronic unemployment and labor precariousness. The arrival of upper classes has brought more amenities and generated institutional changes, but has not enhanced possibilities of upward social mobility for the poor.

### **Physical and symbolic dimensions**

There is an extremely high level of proximity between the two groups described in this study, when compared to historic segregation patterns in Chicago. There are low levels of clustering that range from the scale of blocks, to the scale of building structures, and this almost disappears in mixed-income buildings, where both groups share hallways, elevators, and stairs. Thus, observed by traditional measures, this case presents almost no segregation in housing. However, there are physical barriers that obstruct contact and suppress intergroup relationships. The New Urbanism design of some developments has created some cul-de-sacs, preventing a freer circulation. The issue of surveillance and fear of crime is highly visible, with several security cameras, some private security guards, and screenings for “prison-like” entrances to housing developments. Indeed, the row houses remain like a low-income gated community, with just one entrance on the north and one exit on the south, and with security booths and police cameras everywhere. The utilization of fences, walls, and security devices also have impacts on the symbolic, since they send hostile messages among the population—offering no help in reducing the profound levels of mistrust. And despite the close physical proximity, there are high levels of segregation in other spheres of socialization, like schools, public space, public meetings, churches, and so on. Only the persistent efforts of a few committed neighbors run against these forces. Several interviewees from upper and lower status showed a preference to live in diverse neighborhoods, but the reality beyond those initial preferences is quite different.

Within the symbolic field, the identification with the neighborhood is quite problematic: there is a contested and fragmented identity. The local community is fragmented

between the established and the newcomers, due to their different times of arrival, but mostly due to their opposed claims for the reputation of the neighborhood. For example, there are different names for the area, depending on which group claims ownership: lower-status residents hang on to the historical name (Cabrini Green), and wealthier newcomers have tried to install a variety of names from nearby areas (River North, Near North, Old Town, etc.). In terms of spatial identification, lower-status groups identify themselves with the entire neighborhood. Despite the fact that they do not feel the new amenities are theirs, they maintain an attachment to the whole area. However, upper-status groups just identify with themselves and with their places, and consider lower-status residents as an annoyance for their own success. Aisha, a Black public housing resident in her forties, explains this:

... the homeowners. . . they would call public housing residents to say they are a nuisance. . . I say “what nuisance? What do you mean”. . . I say “what have they done over there? what upset this people? What do they do?”. . . they don’t want to see them. . . as soon as they could see them, they would call the police. . . and make a report. . . they don’t feel that they succeed as long as they see African-American people. . .

Then, between upper- and lower-status groups, there seems to be no need for “the other” and no recognition of each other’s contribution, beyond the resources of the middle class and the labor of lower-status residents.

## Conclusions

Social mix policies are spreading around the world with a language that promises the solution to several social problems, but in a context of welfare retrenchment that has been leaving the poor less protected and in a more unequal position than before. With this study, I wanted to critically challenge the idea of social mix in its poor theoretical grounding and in its ambitious policy rhetoric. Below, I explain one fundamental problem for each of the four dimensions of integration.

Within the *physical dimension*, proximity between different social groups seems to work more as a mechanism of atomization and/or control than as a policy for diverse and peaceful coexistence. This argument goes in line with Uitermark’s (2014) suggestion of social mix performing two roles as a civilizing mechanism: first, local governments can cheaply reduce their burden by decreasing the number of “problematic” individuals; and second, middle classes can extend the power of the State by fulfilling a disciplinary role of respect for it. In fact, these policies are shifting the mechanisms of low interaction from neighborhoods to other spheres of human relations. A large-scale pattern of residential segregation leaves all other segregations relatively determined: school segregation (in a system of boundary areas), public space segregation, and segregation in most local institutions (like churches). However, in a socially diverse neighborhood like Cabrini Green, the concern for establishing mechanisms of differentiation and separation in other instances of social relations becomes much more crucial. In terms of the *functional dimension*, the arrival of more amenities implies a physical and functional modernization of former poor neighborhoods—without necessarily implying a wholesale, complete process of gentrification. But this modernization is not bringing better opportunities for the poor, and is not generating processes of upward social mobility. Ostendorf, Musterd, and De Vos (2001), in an exhaustive comparison between socially heterogeneous and homogeneous neighborhoods in Amsterdam, tested whether neighborhood diversity

contributes in lowering poverty rates. What they found is in line with this study: social mixing does not reduce poverty, and in fact, it is an expensive policy for the poor outcomes exhibited.

Regarding the *relational dimension*, I have mentioned that interactions are marked by fear, distrust, and avoidance. In contexts where inequalities are growing, the everyday contact in diverse neighborhoods triggers conflict, instead of reducing prejudice and improving social relationships. Old studies on social mix, like the one of Chamboredon and Lemaire (1970), have already shown how interaction was impossible, and how this lack of interaction prevented all other potential benefits. Contrary to the so-called “contact hypothesis” (Dixon, 2001) then, the problematic intergroup relationships described above, point more to a “conflict hypothesis” (Häußermann & Siebel, 2001). In other words, the proximity between unequal groups is leading to tension and discordance which, far from reducing, increases their prejudices against each other. And regarding the *symbolic dimension*, one could think that different social groups could identify with the same area, in order to at least recognize the presence and existence of “the other.” However, the case shows a lack of identification and recognition between groups. Here, the four characteristics of Ash Amin’s (2002) idea of “communities without community” have a close resemblance to the Cabrini Green case: (1) the social networks of lower- and upper-status groups do not intersect, since the first are geographically local and the second are extended; (2) intergroup encounters happen just for a few remaining common goods; (3) these groups have different levels of place attachment; and (4) have different cultural customs. As can be seen, all dimensions have some level of connection and clearly influence each other: spatial enclosures complicate interactions, targeted opportunities prevent the construction of common identities, and distrustful relations encourage the construction of even more physical barriers.

It is fair to say that there are two concrete benefits that social mix brings to formerly poor areas. There are lower levels of crime, which certainly reduces the everyday stress experienced by the neighborhood’s long-suffering poor families. And there is a better quality and maintenance of public housing, which provides some dignity and could encourage positive attitudes toward the physical space. However, social mix policies have two important limitations. First, only one portion of the poor (the “deserving,” not more than about 30%) is accepted, which could create more fragmentation and more exclusion. And second, the existing job opportunities (if any) are just a comparative advantage for the poor residents living in socially mixed areas—it seems impossible to use social mixing as a mechanism to decrease the general levels of unemployment in a metropolitan area. Thus, social mix can be seen as a confusing urban arrangement in which the symbolism of physical proximity conceals the persistence of inequality and several active forces creating segregation. There is a considerable discrepancy between the seemingly *progressive rhetoric of social mix* and the contemporary processes of *welfare retrenchment and social fragmentation*. Beyond any good political intention for mixed-income neighborhoods, the results of this and many other studies have shown how ineffective have been these policies to bring more social justice, turning the initial rosy rhetoric into a *broken promise*.

Some decades ago, Lefebvre and Harvey portrayed contradictions in the capitalist city in terms of the centralization of power and the decentralization of poverty (i.e., residential segregation), thus creating the basis for confrontation, making the system unstable, and undermining the reproduction of social relations (Harvey, 1989; Saunders, 1986). In present days, however, the current developments of social mix stand as the perfection

of those contradictions. As Uitermark (2014) describes it, social mix can be portrayed as a dual policy of rent extraction and social control.

Social mixing is (...) a combination of liberal and pastoral politics as it is employed by governments that seek to unleash market forces while wanting to retain their power to govern deprived and defamed neighborhoods. (Uitermark, 2014, p. 1430)

The interrelationship of different dimensions analyzed in this study contributes to building a broader framework for the analysis of “the social mix problem.” The analysis emphasizes how these spaces manifest physical, functional, relational, and symbolic implications at the same time, especially for the poor. It is important to note, though, that the Cabrini Green/Near North area represents an extreme case of demographic diversity, with vast social distances and one of the worst stories of public housing displacement. Thus, it may be possible that other cases of mixed-income housing do not present the severity of the problems exposed here. Finally, there is one future line of research that I believe is important to undertake. There is a need for research on the political economy of “neighborhood effects” (the main base for social mix policies), in which the institutional environment of poor neighborhoods (the school system, for example) is taken seriously to account for emerging social problems.

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### **Notes**

1. For example, there have been at least three recent special issues of prominent academic journals dedicated to social mix and desegregation policies (*Housing Studies* 25(2), 2010; *Cities* 35 (December, 2013); *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 38(4), 2014).
2. I conducted 20 interviews with lower-status residents (100% Black), 20 interviews with upper-status residents (21% Black, 79% White), and 10 interviews with members of key local institutions. Interviewees were recruited at NNUP meetings (see below), and at spaces of inter-group encounter.
3. The Near North Unity Program is a partnership between several grassroots, civil, public, and private organizations and institutions, led by Chicago’s 27th Ward with support from the Local

- Initiatives Support Corporation Chicago (LISC). Although conflictive, this was the only instance in which low-income and higher-income people met and discussed community issues during my fieldwork.
4. Local shops, parks, supermarkets, public library, and specific sidewalks.
  5. I conducted 10 spatial inventories (each about two hours in length), mapping and photographing nonresidential land uses, temporary uses, signs of activity, status markers, and types of affordable housing.
  6. The relationship between gentrification and decreases in crime could be based on: the displacement of a high number of public housing residents; the strict screenings performed on returning public housing residents; the role of condo associations in evicting “problematic” poor Blacks; the revitalized role of the police, the CHA and the City of Chicago; the outsourcing of public housing management to private developers; new security services and devices, etc.

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